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Congress of the United States -
Committee on International Relations
Washington, DC

Honorable Members of Congress,

I feel honored to be here before you and in the same time I thank you for giving me the opportunity.

Much has been spoken and written about Kosova and I feel the right time has come to finally solve the problem wishing for the happiest solution for the good of all the Kosovar citizens living in Kosova. This being a specific argument I believe you have made the right decision to give us the opportunity to present our views as we too are part and a consisting factor, not an irrelevant one, of the Kosovar reality.

As known, Kosova is situated in the Balkans, in the southeastern part of Europe, covering a surface of about 11.000 km² with a population of about 2 million. The overwhelming part of the population is Albanian (93%) with the remaining being Serbs, Montenegrins, and other small minorities, and their religious affiliation composes of 90% Muslim (Albanians), 6% Orthodox (Serbs), and 4% Catholic (Albanians).

Kosova's Catholic Albanians accepted Christianity since Saint Paul and his disciples. Kosova's Muslims too were Catholics before, but during the Ottoman-Turkish rule that lasted for five centuries, they gradually converted to Islam. The overwhelming part converted to that religion during the 17th and 18th century. Many of them today feel nostalgic for their ancestors' faith (Christianity) and it is not unlikely for them to get back to it, as today there are such cases of conversion and this phenomenon is on an increase. They should be supported in this religious awareness.

Here one may understand also religious tolerance as it has been noted by foreigners as well for centuries, and I may rightly say that today we represent and example in the region and beyond as how to live in peace with various faiths. During the last

1990-1999 war this harmony of co-existence has been disordered. Interethnic enmities occurred as the regime used the local Serb-Montenegrin population to exercise violent acts against the Albanian population, not excluding heavy crimes as well.

Although many wars occurred in these areas, the population was never involved and good neighborly relations were always maintained. In numerous cases one side protected the other and vice versa. So, here is an excellent example!

What happened with the damages, destruction of religious objects or any other form of violence we have openly condemned but these grave occurrences of arson happened as a result of involvement of religion in politics. We believe that the assertion that religious objects have allegedly were and are being destroyed just because they happen to be churches cannot stand. If this were the case then the same fate would have befallen to the Catholic churches of Kosova. Yes, indeed. One should emphasize that religion has no place in the daily politics the same as the involvement of the clergy in state policies with their leaders. In brief, identification with politics has always brought great damages to the church, as happened in our case.

It should be pointed out that the assertion that the Orthodox churches are being targeted just because they are such cannot stand either. Many of these churches remained not only untouched for centuries but it was the Albanians who kept them as such.

As stated in the above, although there is a very high percentage of Albanian population of Islam faith one may not speak of Islamic fundamentalism in Kosova. One may not exclude certain individuals of that tendency, but generally such a think may not be used as a label.

I am sure that with the Orthodox Church distancing itself from authorities, at least when considering Kosova, will not be considered as a potential enemy against Albanians and their aspirations and religious objects would no longer be attacked.

We, as a Catholic Church with all the necessary structures of a diocese were and continue to remain forever open to co-existence and co-operation, and we even wish to live together with all and as a token of mutual respect for the good of all the Kosovars regardless of religion or ethnicity. This is the principle stance of the Gospel, a good example of Mother Teresa of Calcutta, daughter of Kosova, and the inexhaustible deed of the great Pope John Paul the 2nd.

Now when we are at the threshold of settling the status of Kosova we strongly believe that there can be no other solution but independence! Kosova's independence endangers no person or country, but instead it serves for the good of all Kosovars, stability of the region and its prosperity.